DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 225 HE 014 715

TITLE	Getting into College. Options in Education Takes Listeners to the Core of the Issues. Program No. 307-308.
INSTITUTION	George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. Inst. for Educational Leadership.; National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Washington, D.C.; National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	OE-810420-T
PUB DATE	81
NOTE	26p.; National Public Radio transcripts.
AVAILABLE FROM	Options in Education, 2025 M Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; Access to Education; Administrator Attitudes; *Admission Criteria; *Admissions Officers; *College Admission; *College Applicants; *Competitive Selection; Decision Making; Higher Education; Selective Admission; Student Attitudes; Talent
IDENTIFIERS	*Dartmouth College NH

ABSTRACT

The admissions decision-making process at Dartmouth College is described in transcriptions of National Public Radio broadcasts. Applicants who are accepted have to be approved at Round Table, where their cases are considered for 30 days by 13 admission officers. These Round Table discussions of specific applicants, whose identities are concealed, are presented to illustrate the deliberations. Additionally, conversations with admissions officers and a candidate provide further perspectives. More than 8,000 high school seniors applied to Dartmouth, and only 1,800 were accepted. Each application, at least 13 pages with four essay questions, is read by three admissions officers. Three "yes" votes generally mean the candidate is accepted, while three "no" votes mean rejection. About 500 get accepted that way, and 1,000 places are filled at Round Table. Through this process, students are assigned an academic rating and a personal rating. Dartmouth trains and uses 2,700 volunteer alumni to interview candidates, some of whom get flags for a special talent or commitment. At Round Table the presenting officer serves as advocate and tries to get the candidate voted into the highest possible Drawer (1, 2, or 3). Typically, the committee spent five to 12 minutes on each candidate before voting. The committee looks for a student who can handle the academic curriculum at Dartmouth but who also will be able to contribute in some area. They may pursue a particular interest or activity in depth. Special considerations, like athletic ability or race, also are addressed, and the admissions procedures of schools like Harvard and Yale are briefly noted. (SW)

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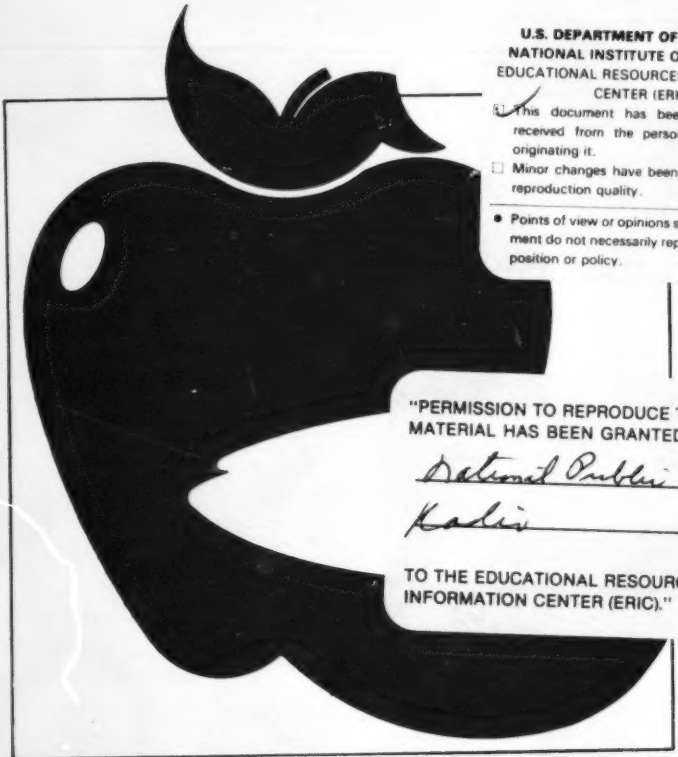

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION

takes listeners to the core of the issues

"Getting Into College"

Catalogue No. OE-810420-T

A co-production of
National Public Radio
and the Institute for
Educational Leadership of the
George Washington University

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"GETTING INTO COLLEGE--PARTS 1 AND 2"

"Getting Into College, Parts 1 and 2" represents the first time either radio or television equipment has been allowed to record and broadcast the college admissions decision-making process. The college is Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire, a member of the Ivy League, and one of the country's most selective institutions. Dartmouth rejects nearly four out of every five applications.

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ROUND TABLE--A YOUNG WOMAN IS VOTED IN

Cleary: They have her as the top ten percent of the class. Uh, she has an all A record, so she has to be one or two in the class. Best scores are 5 over 6, 6 over 3, uh, she was interviewed here as a local candidate by Mary as a 6 over 6, who gave her a Form 6 rating of 7. She's been read three times as a 5 over 6, um, she, uh, may be a 6 over 6, but I think given, uh, the whole picture, I can't quite see that. The personal . . .

Merrow: You're listening in on Round Table, the heart of one college's admissions process. It's not typical--this is one of the country's most selective colleges. About four out of every five students who apply do not get in to Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, an Ivy League college. Most of those who do get accepted have to be approved at Round Table, where their case is presented by one of 13 admissions officers.

Cleary: . . . I don't know why she doesn't, but she really has to be at the top. And I--I really wanted to take her. I--I think she's coming up, uh, now, at this point, rather than earlier, simply because I really don't think she--her Stanines can be stronger than a 5 over 6. But I do think that, uh, she's a very appealing candidate, and I'd like to see her in Drawer 2. If you feel more strongly toward her after I present her, feel free to, uh, vote higher!

(laughter)

But, uh, I, uh, I think she is a very appealing candidate. Briefly, on the academic side, she does have, uh, all As, one B+ back in . . .

Merrow: This year, more than 8,000 young men and women applied to Dartmouth. Only 1,800 were accepted. Each completed application--at least 13 pages, including four essay questions--is read by three admissions officers. Three "yes" votes generally mean the candidate is accepted. Three "no" votes mean rejection. About 5,000 get turned down that way; about 500 get accepted. Another 340 earned early admission in December. That leaves about 1,000 places to be filled at Round Table. Each admissions officer brings up his or her best candidates first.

Cleary: I'll just touch on her activities in high school. Um, she, uh, plays the flute in the band; uh, she's acted as vice president and majorette of the band; she is treasurer of the yearbook staff; she has played tennis for three years and is involved in the school's tennis club. Now she's Honor Society treasurer, one season each of varsity soccer and track, vice president of sophomore and junior class, vice president of the math team, president of the Spanish club--I--I don't see quite the depth in her leadership positions for a personal 7. And, uh, I think on the academic side, it's--it's kind of a toss-up between a 5 and a 6. I think she might eventually perform at 6 level--she has a lot of drive and motivation, uh, but she might have a slightly slow start--it's not a high-powered high school.

Jaegar: Yeah, I--I'd like--I think she's an academic 6; I'd like to see her in the class myself.

Admission officer 1: Very sharp.

Cleary: Yeah.

Admission officer 1: Quite articulate.

Admission officer 2: I think that I--I suspect that that's one of the old farming families down there.

Cleary: I would think so. Um, now, would you like to hear something from the form 2? I--it . . .

Merrow: You're going to need a short vocabulary lesson to understand what these admissions officers are talking about. Here goes--6 over 6, 7 over 6, 8 over 5, and so on--that's the ultimate rating, called the Stanines. They're on a scale of one to nine, the higher the better. The first number is the candidate's academic rating; the second is the personal rating. 670, 710, and so forth, sometimes abbreviated to 67, 71--those are the applicants' S.A.T. scores; and S.A.T. means Scholastic Aptitude Test. Those two scores, plus the applicant's weighted class rank, are combined to give what's called the SVMR--anything around 210 is darn good. Every app, which is short for applicant, also has to take three standardized achievement tests. You'll also hear references to various Forms--2, 3, 4, 5, and 6--sometimes abbreviated to F2, F3, or just the number itself--as in, "What does the 6 say?" Well, those are sections of the application itself. Remember F6--that's what the alumni interviewers say about the applicant. Dartmouth trains and then uses 2,700 volunteer alumni to interview candidates. Some apps get flags--music, art, outdoors, social service, even "guts." That means the admissions committee thinks the student has a special talent or commitment in that area. At Round Table the presenting officer serves as advocate and tries to get the candidate voted into the highest possible Drawer--1, 2, or 3. Everyone in Drawer 1 gets accepted into Dartmouth; most of those in Drawer 2 get in; Drawer 3 means waiting list.

Cleary: I'd be happy to see her go into 1-A.

Admissions officer 2: What have we done in the past at this high school? I mean, I don't imagine we've--.

Cleary: Okay, in the past, we usually see the very top, uh, sometimes the top people from the high school are accepted, sometimes they're not. We don't usually dip very far into the class. This year we have four applicants. One--I think must be incomplete. We don't have anything on her. We have turned down the number six person in the class as an R 2 over 4, there is one P 3 over 5 left alive--so, I certainly wanted to--to see her in the class. And, uh, again, the reason that she's coming up now rather than awhile back is because she's been sitting as a 5 over 6. If--if--if you think she's a 6 over 6, I think that's--that's fine too. She doesn't--. She does have some pretty good achievements. So, 6 over 6, Drawer 1-A. How many for Drawer 1-A? You've got it!

Merrow: She was voted into Drawer 1-A, a new drawer created when all 200 places in Drawer 1 were taken. That means she is accepted into Dartmouth; now it's up to her. Dartmouth accepts 1,800, expects 1,050 to actually register as freshmen in the fall. I'm John Merrow, for NPR's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION. Recently, Dartmouth's admissions committee voted to allow a reporter to watch and record part of its Round Table proceedings, stipulating only that we not reveal the applicants' names or any details that would make their identity obvious. Typically, the committee spent between five and twelve minutes on each candidate before voting.

A YOUNG MAN WITH S.A.T. SCORES IN THE HIGH 700s IS VOTED ONTO THE WAITING LIST AT DARTMOUTH

Admissions officer 3: This young man has definitely earned his day in court, uh, on the academic side. First read as a P 7 over 4, I now have him as an 8 over 4, and I think he's at least an academic 8. The APL is 9-5-5, and that's the trend all the way through the folder. He gets a 1 from the alumni, uh, but listen to these tickets--760 verbal, 710 math, 720 English composition, 780 math level two, 770 chemistry. Okay, then I said plenty of academic power, but now I'm withdrawn on the personal side, and I boosted him to an 8. Okay, now, the guidance counselor, uh, says, "He's an extremely able student who has performed extraordinarily well in all of the various standardized tests. This past September he was named a National Merit semi-finalist. He has a keen mind, has demonstrated extraordinary initiative academically. All of his teachers have tremendous respect for him as a student, and he has always taken a demanding program. Last year as a junior, he took both AP American history and chemistry, scoring a 5 on both exams. This year he is taking three more advanced placement courses--English, math, and physics--and will have taken five AP exams by the time he graduates. English: he has a sensitive understanding for poetry and a superb vocabulary. Math: there is precious little room for further improvement. He has earned a very strong college recommendation, 9-5-5."

(unintelligible group discussion)

Admissions officer 3: Six--okay let me--let me give you the--the personal side here. It's all consistent; we don't seem to get any mixed reviews. This is--(laughter)--this is the 6. "He is a withdrawn, nervous and high-strung individual." This is Michael Freed, '76, and Leslie Kenney, '77. Now--.

Cleary: What does the teacher say?

Admissions officer 3: Okay, the teacher--the teacher--this is his physics teacher and you can see, he goes on and on about the--his expertise in physics and chemistry. "Among the top 20 students in the past 30 years," et cetera, but then, uh, okay, in reference to the academic--the personal side, it says, "Somewhat a loner; however, over the past year he has become . . . began to associate more and more with his peers."

Jaegar: Sounds like someone who would be more comfortable at M.I.T.

(laughter)

Admissions officer 4: Well, what I--what I--when I first read him, I did not see the 4 as negative. It's just that he doesn't do anything. But there's nothing negative. And on the other hand, I think that if he came up here, he would not have a lot of friends. Um, I think he would be somewhat of a loner, and--and would not get out and meet people and take advantage of all of the things that we have. Except Kiwi!

Cleary: Okay, you're going for Drawer--.

Admissions officer 3: I'm leaving this one open. I think--uh--.

Admissions officer 4: I think there is a--there's reason--there's room for someone who--who is, uh, who is alone, you know. We have single rooms, and uh--

(laughter)

--if it's not negative. You know, if he's strong enough, and there's nothing negative there, then I think we--.

Cleary: I think he's an academic 9.

Admissions officer 3: The way I see the 4, I--I say the 4--okay, he definitely is involved in very little, so that gets him down to the 4, I think.

Admissions officer 1: He's a very--I mean, there's no disputing the academic.

Cleary: Yeah, but on the personal side, we do pick up some of the things that they mentioned in the recommendations. That's, I think, what makes you hesitant, because, I mean, they were talking about his reaction to setbacks--high-strung--.

Jaegar: You can't give him more than a 4.

Cleary: No.

(unintelligible)

Cleary: I mean, the shy--.

Admissions officer 5: I think he's a 9 over 3, to be honest!

Admissions officer 2: Oh, I don't.

Cleary: He obviously can write. I'd give between a 4 and a 5.

Jaegar: If he does that well, why isn't he an automatic 9? Where the--if he puts all his activities into his academics, then why--why aren't the numbers fair at 9?

Cleary: I think he does, but he does have the potential to do 9 work.

Jaegar: What else does he do?

Cleary: Well, then, maybe he's a 3. But I think he's no way, you know, an 8, a 7, or whatever. You start out--.

Jaegar: Well, I don't think he's a 7.

Cleary: He's at least an 8.

Jaegar: I don't think he's a 7. I think he's an 8. But I think he's pretty close to a 3. He's got wonderful academic power, but the class is full of academic power. What is he going to do here? He's going to sit in his room and have a miserable time.

Admissions officer 1: Well, there's no indication that he's miserable! I mean, he's just--he's a loner! I mean, you know, you can be a loner and not be miserable!

Cleary: There's "loner" and there's--I mean, the attitudes I hear are high-strung, withdrawn, shy--those things--that's not--I mea.., there's loners who, you know, who--.

Admissions officer 2: --are well adjusted.

Cleary: --who are well adjusted, loners--who don't mind being by themselves, and don't mind not doing anything, and they're going to just go about their business and do what it is they have set out to do. I've heard--I've heard a lot of negative--what I consider negative attitudes.

Admissions officer 1: There's nothing on the form too that really gives a sense of an unhappy person, is there?

Admissions officer 3: No employment experience of any kind.

Cleary: Okay, do you have a sense of where you want to put this person? How about Stanines? Right now he's an academic 8 over 4. Do people agree with that?

Admissions officer 1: No.

Cleary: An academic 8?

(unintelligible)

Cleary: Do you think he's a 3?

Admissions officer 5: I think he's a 9 over 3.

(unintelligible)

Admissions officer 1: I think he's a 9 over 4.

Admissions officer 3: I think he's a 4.

Jaegar: I see 3 as being more negative--.

Cleary: Oh yes!

Jaegar: --than what we've got there, yeah.

Cleary: Okay, so we're calling him an academic 9 over 4, so we'll vote accordingly. How many for Drawer 1-A? How many for Drawer 2? Uh, six. How many for Drawer 3? Okay, he's got Drawer 2.

Merrow: That candidate, with S.A.T. scores in the high 700s, is on the waiting list at Dartmouth.

ADMISSIONS OFFICER DESCRIBES WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CANDIDATES' NAMES BEGIN TO BLUR

Csatari: I'm Judy Csatari, one of the admissions officers.

Merrow: Do the names of the candidates, the characteristics of the candidates, do they kind of blur together after awhile? I mean, you've got 1,800 . . . .

Csatari: When you reach a point, I think, in the reading process, where the candidates start to look alike, most officers will just stop reading, um, whether it's for an hour, whether it's for overnight, um--sure, we all get tired--750 to 1,000 folders--there's an awful lot of folders to process. And we have to know our own limits. We have to know when to stop and when to go back in there and slug it out.

ROUND TABLE--A YOUNG WOMAN IS CONSIDERED

Admissions officer 2: We've just gotten the 6s in, which is very strong. She is--was first read by Mary (unintelligible) as a 7 over 5. Uh, 67 verbal, 68 math--I'm not--I'm not seeing it as a--as a real high, uh, personal, although I think the Form 6 does show some--some good personal dimension here. Uh, but I do feel that the academic 7, which--which, uh, Mary initially gave, is--is pretty solid. Uh, let me give it to you here, as what Mary has--has written, a fairly long write-up: "Sincerity and self-awareness," and her Form 2 reflects both of these qualities. "Her prose is sophisticated and graceful, and her record is excellent--A to A- average, with honors in math and history. Has received two 3s--U.S. history and European history--and a 4--calc B.C.--on her AP's thus far." Okay. "Major involvements seem to have been skiing, teaching 10 hours a week in winters and competing; drama; varsity squash; junior achievement. Has also had some summer work experience. She interests me, let's give her a close look."

The counselor gives a big plug, as Mary said: "Sincerity, self-awareness." And the alums were really able to pick it up and--and really go with it. Uh, "Well adjusted and mature, ready for Dartmouth and college life. She made it clear that she wants to contribute to the life of the college."

Admissions officer 5: Are you pushing for more than a 3?

Admissions officer 2: Yeah, I'm going 2-B.

Jaegar: Well, how about 1-A? How many for 1-A? All right, if she's the best we've got. I--

Cleary: She's the only--how many else did you have?

Admissions officer 2: We have 12s--we have no As, we have a 6 over 6--we do have a legacy 5-6, but that's it. Those are the only three possibles.

Cleary: I think she'll kind of grow into it.

Jaegar: One it is.

CLEARY TELLS HOW "INVOLVED" SHE BECOMES WITH THE CANDIDATES

Cleary: I'm Mary Cleary; I'm an assistant to the director of admissions here.

Merrow: I was watching everybody during this day, and it seemed to me that you are the most intense.

Cleary: Hmm!

Merrow: You just seemed to be kind of focusing in the whole time--not that you don't laugh--everybody laughed. But I wondered--talk to me about your intensity in this process.

Cleary: Well, I think I do take it quite seriously. I--I get personally involved with the candidates, and--I think it's hard not to take this process seriously. I think that's true of everyone--we put in a lot of time, and it--it does pain me to wonder sometimes whether we are making the right decisions, and what kind of a handle we do have on what's important. For example, two factors we have very little information on when we're making these decisions. One would be tolerance--it's very hard to measure tolerance of a 17-year-old. Most of them have never had--have never been in a situation where they have been called upon to demonstrate any unusual degree of tolerance. Another is reaction to setbacks. You heard us discussing today several cases where that was critically important, and we didn't have a very good measure for it. And what we try to do is, through this subjective process, pass it through different sets of eyes, and--and see what we come up with, see if we can come to some form of agreement. But there's a large margin for error, and sometimes we see them walking around campus.

Merrow: Do you take this home with you at night? Do you think about it?

Clary. No! (laughter) Sure! I think--I think everyone does. There are nights I've gone to sleep thinking about kids, and mornings I've thought of a certain person as soon as I wake up. It's not always that way, but from mid-November until the end of March this is what occupies most of our time.

ROUND TABLE--ANOTHER YOUNG WOMAN IS CONSIDERED

Jaegar: Okay, the final case of the day is out in sunny California. She has a 640 verbal and a 620 math; she's 10th in the class. This is her first full year at the school--she transferred in this year from another school right out in the area. I think probably one helpful bit of advice comes from the 6. It was done by people who know the college well--Sue Benjamin, '79; Larry Pirout, '77; and Al Hennig, '77, whose wife obviously used to work with us. And they give her a 7. She's got some interesting dimension to her in leadership--some sports. They say, "Articulate, gregarious, sparkling. Not the most mature candidate we have met, but seems to have a great deal of potential. Very involved in athletics, particularly volleyball. Spent two weeks in Japan, climbed Mt. Fuji. Switched to present high school this year and seems to have handled the adjustment very well. Held a waitress position for well over a year, recently quit to pursue interest in animal care, now works with a vet." And they did not discuss any of the academics, so they're basing their rating on facts other than those that we have here. The ratings, as you'll see on the master card, went from a Mike Varley A 5 over 6--to a R.G.J. P 6 over 7; then Mary--and then Mary took a look and said 6 over 6--she couldn't quite get the 7 out of it. So she's somewhere in that range. What did you say, Mike?

Varley: When did I read that?

Jaegar: You read that on 1/5/81. And you noted the volleyball--she's captain of the volleyball--also softball and soccer. So we have softball, volleyball, soccer--you say personally is where she really shines. Uh, "happy, friendly, bundle of energy, all recs are very praiseworthy." The Form 3 shows really, uh, initiative, curiosity, and energy, again. She's got two B+s, and the rest As this year, although a couple of those are in studio art and P.E. So she's got B+ English, B+ Spanish, A in advanced bio, with six lab periods, and A in pre-calculus. She's--she was vice president of her freshman class at her former school, president of the junior class at the former school--that's a tough pill to swallow--you switch schools, you lose a lot of that momentum you've developed. Photography club, softball team, basketball, tennis, volleyball, uh, C.S.F.--uh, California Scholarship Federation, and high honors. She moved into a tougher situation and proved she can do it. Uh, the chairman of the science department gives her a good, uh, push right here. "Shows good healthy 'bump' of curiosity--the class isolated an enzyme, lysozyme, from egg whites. She went beyond the required work, devised additional purification procedure," et cetera. So, there you have her. I think, uh--.

Admissions officer 1: Where do you see her?

Jaegar: Well, we've got three different--this is a good one to kick around. Because Mike said 5 over 6--now he may feel a little differently now, because it's not January 5.

Varley: Four over 6!

Jaegar: I say 6 over 7. I liked her personal, uh, um, qualities. The academic 6 some of you may doubt. Uh, I don't know. Mary says 6 over 6. So she's right in there someplace. I think what makes me go out on a limb, uh, is the fact she moved into a tougher school and hung in. So she's 10 out of 52, bio 700, Spanish 630--640, verbal 620--she's a worker, got the extra pizazz. I'll bet you a month of Big Macs that she comes here and does 6 work.

Varley: I'll take that bet!

Cleary: A month of Big Macs?

(laughter)

Jaegar: Not the whole--not the whole room now!

(laughter)

I will bet--I will bet Judy a month of six-packs--of Big Macs! She'll probably eat only one!

(unintelligible)

Did I say six-packs? You know what's on my bloody mind, don't you! Okay, there she is, 5 over 6, 6 over 7, 6 over 6--.

Cleary: Well, I don't think she's a 7.

Admissions officer: I don't think she's a 6.

Jaegar: How many for Drawer 3? Well, you know, I can put her in 4! Okay, Drawer 3 it is.

JAEGER SAYS LAUGHTER IS IMPORTANT DURING ROUND TABLE

Jaegar: I'm Dick Jaegar, and I'm the associate director of admissions at Dartmouth. I more or less run the session from a parliamentary point of view, tally the votes and call for the votes, but I think beyond that, I do not try to--to dominate or interject any more than anybody else. I guess I do have a kind of a screwball sense of humor now and then, and I like to get a good laugh in and loosen them up now and then. And so, uh, I guess I do get a glint in my eye sometimes when I see something that strikes me or could have a double meaning, I, uh, will very often let it out, because I think when people are loose they're--they're more apt to discuss a case with real vigor and get into things that, uh, might make a difference in the final vote.

Merrow: That laughter doesn't indicate insensitivity to these kids, who after all are--they've got their lives on the line in some way?

Jaegar: No. As a matter of fact, I think rather than indicating, uh, insensitivity to these kids, uh, that laughter bespeaks the--the kind of tension that we all feel, because we have so many strong candidates--pile after pile of them--and we're all acutely aware of how difficult it is to decide which ones are going to be chosen, and acutely aware of how we are going to have to explain to

some of those who don't make it why they didn't. And when we bring these cases up, I think we're aware that we've made a decision, and we are hopeful that it's the right one, but we know that in some cases we may be wrong. We may be leaving out the one who is, in fact, better. So that when we have a--a laugh, I think, sure, there's a spirit of fun. But I also think it's part of the intensity in that when something does come out that's a--a little bit light, it gives us all a chance to kind of sigh and laugh a little.

Merrow: You said agony. Do you really mean that word? That's a strong word.

Jaegar: I do. When you meet these students on the road, when you interview them, when you have alumni and parents calling, writing, and you see how many good ones there are, and you see some you really, really like, and you are aware that for a variety of factors they are not going to make it--there just simply will not be room for them--that's agony to me--that's frustration. I mean, I've had to say no, over the last few years in particular, or be party to saying no, to sons and daughters of classmates, neighbors, family--relatives. Uh, when you're denying them something that to them at that stage in their lives is just so much a part of their future, that's agony to be part of that. Yeah, I would say that.

Merrow: Can you really know somebody from this pile of paper?

Jaegar: If you realize that these piles of paper have been read two, three, sometimes four times before they get here. Witness that case that we just brought up. It had had a first reading, it had had an interview here in Hanover, it had had a second reading, it had had a third reading by Mary. So that by the time that person came up here, there's knowledge of that case. Then you prepare the case--you get to know it--sometimes more hastily than you would like, other times you--you spend a couple of minutes or 20 minutes. So that when you come up, to present your days' worth of two or three cases, that's digging in. I think you know the things you want to put forth that, hopefully, will get this person a spot in the class.

Merrow: Could you have a formula? S.A.T. scores 15 percent, high school grades 21 percent, recommendations 8 percent--well, something like that?

Jaegar: You might be able to in a certain percentage of the cases, but there are so many where I'd think the formula would break down that I don't believe it would be valid. I think if you would witness this for a number of days--you've been here for a day--if you really looked at the master cards you'll see that some of these people coming through have astronomical numbers, but not much else. Others coming along don't have such impressive numbers, but their involvements, their aspirations, the way they write, what they've read, really make them live. Uh, we're willing to go to bat and say the numbers in enough instances don't tell us all there is to know. So that we are going to add the subjective to all of our deliberations and not just go on numbers.

Merrow: Dick Jaegar, the associate director of admissions at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Jaegar: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten--he's a 2.

Clary: Okay, uh--.

Admissions officer 5: Do you mean a 2-B with the same, uh, approach--approach that we used--

Jaegar: But also with the same option of--if you find one that everyone agrees upon as a 1, we'd have room in 1-A.

Merrow: To get a copy of this two-part series called "Getting Into College," call this toll-free number: 800 253-0808. The cassette recording costs $7.00, the printed transcript $3.00. The number again: 800 253-0808. In Michigan call 616 471-3402. OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University. Support for the series is provided by the National Institute of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Our engineers for this program: in the field, Sam Sanders; in the studio, Rich Ford. Co-host Barbara Reinhardt is on assignment. I'm your co-host and producer, John Merrow, and this is NPR--National Public Radio.

"GETTING INTO COLLEGE, PART 2"

A CANDIDATE DESCRIBES HER HOPES AND FEARS, AND HER EFFORTS TO BE ACCEPTED AT DARTMOUTH

Flanders: My name is Sonia Flanders, and I'm a senior at the Sidwell Friends' School. And I have applied to Trinity, and Middlebury, and Colgate, University of Vermont, and Dartmouth.

Merrow: Which is your first choice?

Flanders: Dartmouth!

Merrow: You say that with your eyes lighting up. Enthusiastically so?

Flanders: Very so! I've always wanted to go there.

Merrow: Do you think that matters to them? The fact that you want to really go there, you really are eager to go there.

Flanders: I hope it does! Um, I always heard that if you show a school--I mean, you're qualified, to a certain extent--that you really want to go there, it makes them, I mean, see that you're somewhat special. I applied for the early decision, got deferred, and they know I want to go there. They know it was my first choice. I've had recommendations telling them that I want to go there and will go there. And it--you know, they have to see that I would be happy there and I would be a good contributor.

Merrow: She's one of more than 8,000 high school seniors who applied for admission into the freshman class at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. About four out of five applicants were turned down. Applying there means taking five national standardized tests, being interviewed, and writing four short essays as part of a 13-page application form.

Flanders: Well, the Dartmouth application--I don't know if they're listening to us, but--is very hard. And it was a--definitely the most difficult one I had to fill out. And it's very long. And I spent about three weeks filling the entire thing out.

Merrow: Three weeks?

Flanders: The reason why it took me so long is, one essay--it just--it took me a long time to decide exactly how to go about it--how to tackle it. One of--for example, one of the questions, um, was, how would you--how would a friend--it was how would a friend describe you in fifty years--or in ten years--ten years, something like that--in fifty words or less? Well, fifty words is very small. I didn't really realize that. So I wrote tons of little paragraphs, and they were all horrible, so I finally ended up with one. And that took me at least a week. I was impressed, though. I thought the questions really weren't just absurd questions and "Why in the world are they asking this to me, why do they want to know this." I thought it took--they can definitely see a person's personality.

Merrow: In all, Sonia spent three weeks working on her application, hoping to persuade Dartmouth to accept her. Her approach? Be honest.

Flanders: I'm not qualified, as far as the math goes--my math is horrible. And I know it, and they obviously will know it as soon as they look at my S.A.T.s and grades. And I told them that might real--that might not let me in Dartmouth, but I want to go here and I will try to work on it. But I know it's bad, and then, I was just very honest about myself, and I think they appreciated it. Hopefully it will work! I don't know. Hmm. That's about all I can say.

Merrow: It didn't work. Dartmouth College rejected Sonia Flanders, just as it did more than 6,000 other applicants. A 13-person admissions committee decides which 1,800 students to say "yes" to, in a process that takes nearly six months--from November to April--and costs $600,000. The heart of the process is Round Table--30 days of intense consideration of about 1,000 candidates. One admissions officer presents each applicant and argues for his or her admission. Finally, the full committee votes.

ROUND TABLE--A YOUNG MAN IS VOTED ONTO THE WAITING LIST

Admissions officer 1: Recommendations are--are very general--supportive, but, uh, they don't really give us a whole lot of--of insight. Uh, I think, uh, the main thing that puts him, uh, into the competition at all would be his numbers. His record there has been very strong. Uh, he's taken all their honors courses; however, his grades dropped from the first quarter to the second quarter, which is another reason we haven't, uh, brought him in any sooner. He's taken--

Cleary: Did you say, uh, would you say that his Form 2 is not that impressive, and yet he does have a 770 verbal? I mean--.

Admissions officer 1: That's correct. His numbers come out to a--a 214, even with the slightly depressed class rank that he has. And Candy did the first reading and just felt that his--the writing doesn't--doesn't flow smoothly. I felt that he just didn't really say very much on--on his--on his Form 2, and therefore we didn't see him as the academic 8 that his numbers might say--.

(unintelligible)

He might have been--I think the one--the one thing that looks good at this point is the Form 6, which just came in. It says, "A quiet, sincere, mature young man, confident but not cocky, easy to talk with, interested in other opinions. Quiet, purposeful young man who knows what he wants and will find a way to get it. Well rounded, intelligent, will have no trouble with any program at Dartmouth. Visited campus and Dartmouth is his first choice. Would make a fine addition to the student body." I--I guess my inclination would be to see if he becomes a hot W, and would--would go for Drawer 3, unless somebody feels that there's enough here--if you'd like me to read something

from the--from the Form 2, I'd be happy to, but, uh . . .

Admissions officer 2: Voted a 3 by this . . .

Merrow: He was voted into Drawer 3, which means he's on the waiting list at Dartmouth. Anyone in Drawer 1 is accepted, and most of those voted into Drawer 2 also get in. There are some other terms the admissions people use that require translation: 6 over 6, 7 over 6, 5 over 7--the ultimate rating, the Stanines. The first number is the academic rating; the second, personal. The scale is 1-9, the higher the better. 680, 720, et cetera, et cetera, sometimes abbreviated to 68, 72. Those are the candidates' S.A.T. scores, and S.A.T. means Scholastic Aptitute Test. Those two scores, plus the weighted class rank, provide the S.V.M.R.--anything around 210 is darned good. Every app, short for applicant, also has to take three standardized achievement tests. You'll hear committee members talking about As and Ps--As being acceptances, and Ps being possibles. Then there are the forms--2, 3, 4, 5, and 6--sometimes abbreviated to F2, F3, and so on. The F6 carries a lot of weight--it's what the alumni interviewers say about the candidate. End of vocabulary lesson. I'm John Merrow for NPR's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION. Recently the Dartmouth admissions committee voted to let me watch and record two days of Round Table, stipulating only that we not reveal the candidates' identity. This applicant has S.A.T. scores of 760 and 730--or 76 and 73--and is 14th in his class. Dartmouth put him on the waiting list.

ANOTHER YOUNG MAN IS PUT ON THE WAITING LIST

Cleary: So, I have him right now as a P 8 over 5, um, I'm going Drawer 2. I think that there is a lot of power there with his S.A.T.s, um--.

Admissions officer 1: Could you read something? Please?

Cleary: Okay.

Admissions officer: I'd just add, I gave him a 5--we didn't talk about academics, and so I just gave him a 5.

Cleary: What is this? His question is, "Comment on any aspect of the college application process." Okay, he's going to comment. "I find the application essay to be intriguing because of the dilemmas it presents, both for the applicant and the admissions officer. I envy the position of an admissions officer--" great! "--to be able to read and judge some of what I suspect is the most creative writing being done today!" (laughter) Did you know that that's what we're doing? "For they receive the best attempts of many of the brightest people at the age when they are the most ingenious. I think it very funny to note the ironic circle that runs through the essay. The admissions officers write the question in such a way that the applicant will unconsciously reveal himself. However, the applicant knows that, and tries to write his essay to reveal what he thinks the admissions officer wants to see, without making it apparent that he is trying to reveal anything at all. In turn, the officer reads the essay, trying to determine, based on what the applicant has

revealed, what the applicant is really like. It is enough to make one throw up one's hands in frustration and resort to pulling names from a hat."

Admissions officer 1: He does well!

Cleary: Okay, P 8 over--now that he's just told us what we're doing! Drawer, uh--I mean, are people ready to vote, or do you want to hear more on this person?

(unintelligible)

Okay--

Jaegar: How many for 2? Two it is.

Admissions officer 5: Can it be verified then, please, from yesterday's conversation about automatic 8 over 5s and 5 over 8s--

Jaegar: I don't remember--I wasn't even here when you talked about it--there's nothing automatic, about anything. Does anybody want to put this fellow into 1-A? Somebody feel that way?

Admissions officer 1: I don't--I just--well, being in the region, I feel comfortable with him being in 2.

Cleary: All right, do people feel strongly that he's not--an 8 and not a 5?

Admissions officer 5: Everybody believes that he's a 5? Is that correct personally, or at least the majority agree that he's a 5, and we've agreed on the 8, so he's an 8 over 5 and he's into Drawer 2.

ADMISSION DIRECTOR DISCUSSES SPECIAL TREATMENT FOR CERTAIN GROUPS OF CANDIDATES

Quirk: I'm Al Quirk, director of admissions.

Merrow: Do you do something to make sure there are 11 football players, or enough players for the hockey team, whatever?

Quirk: The coaches don't think so! They are convinced that we're working very hard to make sure there aren't! Coaches, uh, have a list--they do a lot of traveling and they're--they do a lot of writing, and candidates write to them, and they, of course, have a sorting procedure to go through themselves. They have to determine, in the case of hockey, is this person capable of being helpful in Division 1. If so, the coach will encourage that student, assuming that he thinks--say the coach and the candidate both think--that academically the candidate's qualified. Then the coach will come in with a list and say, "Here are the people that I think are the best qualified for Dartmouth on the basis of academics and hockey ability, or football ability." Their next problem is to convince us that that's so.

We'll do the same thing with--with those with

music--flags--you heard us refer to flags. The music department sends us over a list, and we'll bring that up--you haven't heard too much discussion about that in this--you'd hear someone comment on a particular talent, but not identified by the department. So their list is complete--they've auditioned, oh, maybe a hundred or two hundred students--candidates. So we'll look at that group in a separate round, uh, and we'll also look at other things that we've identified as we've gone along in a separate round.

Merrow: In the time I've been here, you haven't talked about children of alumni--of graduates. Are those applications treated separately?

Quirk: Yes, I've written to a large number of parents--Dartmouth parents--and have told them that this is the time to get in any information that should come to our attention. The--we would have a large number of Dartmouth legacies who would be clearly acceptable, and they are in the class.

Merrow: They're already in.

Quirk: Yeah. A large number that are clearly not acceptable, and they're out. In between will be, uh, where after our three readings we have to determine whether they're in our out.

Merrow: They're Ps--possibles?

Quirk: Correct, right--possibles. And that's the group to whom I've written--I've written to their parents, and--and I'm hearing from them either by phone or by letter or personal, uh, contact. We will--there is a significant difference in our treatment.

ROUND TABLE--A YOUNG WOMAN IS CONSIDERED

Admissions officer 3: . . . I don't know, I think she's definitely, uh, weighed this material, but, uh, I don't know. There aren't too many negatives. Let me--let me see what you think. Okay. Number one out of a class of 310, alumni give her a 7, 54 verbal, 67 math--.

Admissions officer 1: And what are her Stanines?

Admissions officer 3: Excuse me, she's been read as a--a 5 over 7, 5 over 6, we see her as a 6 over 6. Okay. The S.V.M.P. is 201; she is a 6 as far--let me look at the academic parts. Her academics are good, uh, for the school. They say 40 percent go on. She has, uh, everything is an A. There's not a B on the transcript. I assume she's taking a pretty good schedule for the school--all As in it. I think she does earn the 6 with the 201 also--valedictorian.

Admissions officer 1: Why are you ambivalent about her? If she is a valedictorian, and the last one left from Wyoming . . .

Admissions officer 3: I'm going to get to that right now!

Okay, what does she do? I'm ambivalent because I'm--superficially she's got everything she needs, and I--I don't know. That's why I'm giving her to you, because I can't seem to make up my mind for some reason. Uh, the F2 is nothing spectacular; I'd say it's competent. She writes about, uh, Brave New World--the slitter did a number on a couple of lines here, so they don't quite go together--Henry David Thoreau, what are your short-term and long-term goals, relatively brief, but not bad. Uh, so, my question to you--oh, let me read--shall I read the--.

Admissions officer 2: Right now it's a 6 over 6, but at one point she was a 5 over 7?

Admissions officer 3: Yes, yes--.

Admissions officer 2: 6 over 7.

Admissions officer 3: I think the extra-curriculars are all there, no problem. Uh, the academics for her school are there, and I think she's a definite 6. Uh, and as I say, I can't really, uh, verbalize my reservations to you very well. So as to where you want to put her, it's up to you.

Quirk: How many for 1-A?

(unintelligible group comments)

How many--let's see the 1-A pitch here. One, two, three four--1-A it is.

COMMITTEE IS LOOKING FOR "DEEP" CANDIDATES, NOT "WELL-ROUNDED"

Sateia: I'm Holly Sateia, I'm on the admissions committee at Dartmouth.

Merrow: And you're one of the few of the 13 who's actually not a Dartmouth grad.

Sateia: Right. There are three of us who are non-Dartmouth graduates.

Merrow: I don't hear anybody balancing regions. And I know you want some kind of geographical balance.

Sateia: We don't have geographical quotas, um, so that really--that really is not a consideration. We might say, like today someone came up from Wyoming, and they did mention that; they did say that they had--we had three candidates from Wyoming, or something like this. So in that sense, geography might get a plug. I think geography is weighed more in terms of the background of the student. Uh, there are some students who are, uh, born with ivy leagues on their forehead. I mean, you know, they are--they know they're going to go to an Ivy League school. Their guidance counselors, their teachers are telling them, "Apply to Ivy League." Then you have some of these kids from the back woods--and not even from the back woods; just rural areas or whatever--and they're not being told that every day. They're not saying they have to go and apply to Ivys. A lot of my region is in the Deep South. And when I

go to the Deep South and tell them I'm from Dartmouth, uh, they go, you know, "What is that?" Is--I've been told that it's a small junior college in Delaware! And when we get an applicant from an area that there's not that pressure, and there's not that, uh, competitive leaning of going to the Ivys--taking the S.A.T.s ten times--um, if they come in with scores that are lower, they might be accepted if we see potential there. But it's not really state to state; it's really the background of the high school and the area.

Merrow: Suppose somebody listening to this decides that he or she wants to go to Dartmouth. Is there something to do? Is there any kind of formula that will really get into this college?

Sateia: I don't think that there's a formula, no. I--when I'm counseling students, I tell them that--the way that I describe the process right now is that in the past, we were looking for the well-rounded student, or I think in the college admissions in general they were looking for the well-rounded student, the one that could--I always use the example of play tennis, climb a mountain, and sing an opera at the same time! Now, I don't think that that's the case so much. I think what we're looking for is a student who will be able to handle the academic curriculum at Dartmouth, but also be able to contribute in some area. If they, um, you know, if they pursue music with a lot of depth, and then maybe have some other interests too--but there's something that they spend a lot of time doing. Maybe it's backpacking, maybe it's dramatics, but it's something that they spend a lot of time doing, and they have grades that show us--or an acacemic curriculum that shows us--that they can make it through. I mean, we realize we're not infallible, okay. We're not claiming infallibility at all. We know that we could go through and pick an entirely different class and still be very satisfied with that class. So I don't--in some cases you actually will look at candidates and you can say, "This candidate is better than that candidate." But with the pool that we're working with, you can't always say that. And certainly you can't say that the people that we reject cannot do the work at Dartmouth. There may be some in that group that we feel are not prepared or not qualified for Dartmouth. But the majority of the candidates that we turn down could graduate from Dartmouth College.

ROUND TABLE--A YOUNG WOMAN GOES ON THE WAITING LIST

Admissions officer 3: . . . a 508, and we're going for Drawer 3 here. Uh, 590 verbal, 600 math, but number 10, a 508, a 7 from the alumni. Two strongest achievements are math level one with a 66, Spanish with a 64. Form 4 shows an A student with a regular course load in a competitive environment. After that the 3, 6 and 5 came in, and I said Forms 3 and 6 are strong plugs. Form 5 shows all As, including two APs. The best ranked, and probably the strongest overall of nine applicants from this very competitive high school, and as you remember, I was juggling this one and the other one, and I decided the other one was stronger overall. But I think that the--the force behind the academic 6 is not the scores, it is the transcript. Not one B all the way through. Just a P--P

in--oh yes, excuse me! B in ceramics! Everything else are As, and the counselor says, "Her dedication to the task she has to do and her determination to succeed at whatever she attempts are reflected in her nearly-perfect academic record. She was able to maintain her all-A record in honors courses in the tenth grade, along with adapting to a new school system. Although she had not taken the prerequisite course, she transferred into the advanced placement English course with ease at mid-year in the eleventh grade. She seems to find learning to be an enjoyable challenge. Her teachers feel she is responsible, highly motivated, well-organized, consistent, thorough, thoughtful, and a fine class participant. She expresses herself well, both orally and in writing." On the personal side, um, first of all, in terms of athletics, she has four varsity letters in tennis; right now she's personally tutoring a deaf child and a handicapped child; a third activity that she's involved in is bicycling--last winter she worked 15 hours a week through the winter to earn money to take a cycling trip in Europe. Also she contributes to the yearbook and the, uh, newspaper. You people like to hear more?

Quirk: How many for a 3? Three it is.

QUIRK EXPLAINS DARTMOUTH'S ADMISSION PROCEDURE FOR BLACKS AND OTHER MINORITIES

Merrow: In the time I've been here, none of the candidates you brought up have been anything other than white. Where are the black kids? Where are the native American kids? Hispanic kids?

Quirk: We'll have a special round in two weeks, and we'll try to get full faculty participation--our committee, the committee on admission to financial aid. This selection time comes at a particularly bad time for many of them, because they are just in--starting exams or at the end of the term. So we--.

Merrow: The faculty are?

Quirk: The faculty. So we schedule our Round Table session for minority students at a time when they can participate more fully. So they will sit in with us, deliberate--.

Merrow: Why do you want the faculty in?

Quirk: They are the ones that are going to have to teach, uh, the students, and if we want to, uh, ignore some traditional predictors--low scores--if we want to use race as a criterion for some of these students, and ignore some of the traditional predictors, we'd like to have the faculty aware of this and participate in it.

Merrow: You said "If you want to." You do want to!

Quirk: Well, you don't want to ignore criteria just for the sake of ignoring criteria. In other words, the--the--the point of their participation is to know that some of these students will come from an educational background which is different from the traditional student. Many of them will

be helpful in looking at the programs that have been taken at other schools, scores which are different from the typical scores. I don't think anyone--I don't think any institution claims that it is looking at minority students just as if they were like all of the others. They do come from non-traditional backgrounds, and we'd like to have the faculty--the faculty's made a commitment in this area as a whole; the institution's made a commitment--so we'd like to have the faculty be much--be very much a part of what we're doing.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER IVY LEAGUE ADMISSION PROCEDURES

Merrow: You say you're not really competing with Harvard, Yale, those folks. I know you talk to the admissions people--to your counterparts at the other highly-selective schools. Do you do it the same way? Is your process pretty much the same?

Quirk: Yes. Harvard, uh, has a larger group to deal with, and they therefore are--from my knowledge of what they do, they are more computerized. They would be sitting around in perhaps a larger room, um, and each person would have a print-out, and they would be going down by school. You saw us using dockets. We use them for reference. They'd be--they'd be going, uh, school by school. They would have folders available, but they probably wouldn't refer to them very much. They don't do much writing. They don't have much give and take, uh, they couldn't on 16,000 applications. So they're more concerned with school-by-school comparisons. And of course they're dealing with a--with an extremely well-qualified group, and they grind a lot more objective data into the computer. Princeton's system would be more similar--would be quite similar to ours--advocacy. If we were dealing with twice as many candidates, we might have to be more objective. We might have to use more quantification, which we hope doesn't happen.

ROUND TABLE CONSIDERS ANOTHER YOUNG MAN

Quirk: Now I don't know who did the, uh--first reading was done by--Mary made him a 6 over 5, and, uh, I don't know if you--she mentions the Form 2 is the thing that--there is some question. Form 2 is "candid, introspective." I think that's very true. He wouldn't be a leader around here, but he'd do a good job academically, good P.R. move--I don't know what that means. Ruth said strong courses--very strong on the academic side. Let's see what Form 6 thinks. This was on Ruth's reading. Very interesting guy.

(unintelligible group comments)

He's, uh, taken a good program, and he's way up in the class--what is he, number three in 331, and one of the teachers said the best. Shakespeare seminar A-, advanced placement English--which is apparently another course--A, AP history B, calculus A-, physics A, French advanced placement level two B, um, mostly As, a few B+s in previous years, a few A+s here. As, Bs--this is not a bad school. This is a suburb of . . .

HEBERT COMMENTS ON WHETHER A LOTTERY WOULD BE JUST AS EFFECTIVE AS ROUND TABLE

Hebert: I'm Don Hebert, I'm an assistant director of admissions at Dartmouth.

Merrow: I have a feeling that you could take these 8,000 applicants--maybe go through and cull out some that, perhaps, clearly couldn't do the work--you'd be left with 6,000 terrific candidates. I have a feeling you could have a lottery--you wouldn't have to go through this process--and you'd end up with a terrific class.

Hebert: I think--uh, I think that's--that's conceivable. Uh, one thing that has to be taken into consideration is the way that we're doing it, we're all aware of what's going on in the school situation. You don't--we don't want to take someone who's number twelve in the class, for example, and pass up the person who's number one at--without knowing why we did it, at least.

Merrow: But you might do that.

Hebert: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we do it all the time. But if we do it, we want to do it consciously, and not, uh, get all done with the class and say, "Well look, we took the person that was number, uh, twelve in the class, um, and their S.A.T. scores weren't as strong, uh, the alumni--alumni interview wasn't as strong, uh, as the person who was number one. So why did we take the--the number twelve person and not the number one person?" In actuality, the--the difference between the two might be very little. But, uh, you never can tell.

ROUND TABLE CONTINUES

Quirk: . . . pretty--it's a pretty high-powered school.

Cleary: You're going for more than a 3, or are you going for a 3?

Quirk: No, I think had the 6 come in earlier, with this very strong recommendation, I think a thoughtful 6--I think he's close to a--I think he's close to a 7 over 6--5 doesn't really seem appropriate for this--.

Admissions officer 1: Will you go over that 5 again for me then, because--or that 6, whatever you want to call it--.

Quirk: The academic--the personal?

Admissions officer 1: Yeah.

Quirk: Uh, a lot of work. He's worked year around. Cross-country running, uh, piano, uh, very--this is very interesting--"When compared with my other continuing interests, playing the piano takes up very little time. In fact, I play the piano an average of only ten minutes a day. Those ten minutes, however, bring a lot of enjoyment into my life, and, unfortunately, a degree of irritation to the lives of other family members. (laughter) Once begun, my piano concerto may echo a rough day through incessant,

loud repetition, or lilting bizarre melody. This very release of tension, as annoying as it may be, is what makes my piano playing so important. True, mutilating "Clare de Lune" doesn't make my problems go away. (laughter) But playing the piano still remains as perhaps my only non-competitive form of release from the pressure-packed college prep world. Having eased my frustrations, I perform better for the remainder of the day. Therefore, the short time I spend tickling--and sometimes torturing--the ivories, is the most, proportionately speaking, productive part of my waking hours."

Admissions officer 1: . . . he writes real well, but--I'm not sold on the personal side, for some reason.

Quirk: How many people would put him in 2-B?

Merrow: And part of Round Table, the heart of the admissions process at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. That's not the way most colleges do it. Only highly-selective ones like Dartmouth have the luxury--and the responsibility--of selecting from among many applicants. Those voted into Drawer 1 get in; most in Drawer 2 also make it; Drawer 3 means waiting list.

Quirk: We'll go right down the ladder there. How many for Drawer 1-A? (laughter) How many for 2-B? How many for Drawer 3? Two-B.

Merrow: If you'd like a copy of this two-part series, "Getting Into Colleg," here's what to do. Call this toll-free number: 800 253-0808. The printed transcript costs $3.00; the cassette recording costs $7.00. The number again is 800 253-0808. In Michigan call 616 471-3402. OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University. Support for the series is provided by the National Institute of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Our engineers for this program, in the field, Sam Sanders; in the studio, Karen Bleckman. Co-host Barbara Reinhardt is on assignment. I'm your co-host and producer John Merrow. And this is NPR--National Public Radio.